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## **Individual and Educational Risk Factors for Violence Perpetration. Prophylactic Aspects of Pedagogization**

### **Abstract**

The article addresses the issue of risk factors for high aggression of women taking action of a violent nature. The study group consisted of 44 women selected on the basis of studies in Family Diagnostic and Consultation Centres, being remanded in custody, or imprisoned. The study examined the dependencies between intensification of aggression and such groups of variables as: educational circumstances, family socialisation conditions, manifestations of demoralization in childhood and adolescence periods, current life circumstances, demographic characteristics, and psychological variables. The application of multiple regression analysis allowed for distinguishing three main factors of women's aggression (negativism, attitude to school, and theft in childhood/adolescence periods). On the basis of the research findings, psychological and pedagogical directions of prophylactic action were put forward.

**Keywords:** *violence, aggression, risk factors for use of violence, women's aggression*

### **Theoretical basis**

Contemporary subject literature indicates diversity of the pattern of crime commission, including violent crimes, depending on the gender of the perpetrator, which shows that it is desirable to conduct research into patterns and risk factors for committing crimes separately for men and women (Resing et al.,

2006; Rossegger et al., 2009; Van Voorhis et al., 2010). Thus far, most studies on predictors of violence occurrence have been focused on groups of male inmates or men staying in mental hospitals (Yang et al., 2013). Not numerous studies on aggressive behaviour and violence used by women indicate typical groups of risk factors, such as: younger age, residing in social-assisted housing, presence of early conduct problems, early onset of alcohol abuse, excessive drinking, histories of victimization or abuse, victim of domestic violence, mental illness, drug abuse, self-harming, dating aggression, traumatized by separation/divorce, cohabiting, marital/relationship strain, victimization by partner, past criminal justice involvement, unemployment, living in a rural area, poverty and parental issues (O'Leary et al., 2014; Yang et al., 2013; Van Voorhis et al., 2010; O'Leary et al., 2008).

The increase in the intensification of women's aggressive behaviour observed in Poland in recent years, in interpersonal relations, and particularly in partnership relationships (Public Opinion Research Centre CBOS 2005, 2009, 2012), makes the issue of delving into the nature of the phenomenon, and consequently creating an opportunity to counteract it efficiently, an extremely up-to-date subject of social significance. This study mainly focused on educational and family environment oriented aspects, since determining early risk factors regarding aggression and the use of violence give a chance to detect them yet in the school period and to take adequate prophylactic measures.

The theoretical framework for the adopted model of risk factors for aggressive behaviour and the use of violence constitutes: Buss' behavioural theory (1961), according to which aggression is a habit of reacting aggressively to certain social situations; Leary's (2004) conception of the interpersonal model of personality defining two dimensions of interpersonal functioning of the individual, namely: locus of control (the continuum from dominance to submission) and emotional attitudes (the continuum from affiliation to hostility); and Bandura's social learning theory (2007), according to which persons who were witnesses to or victims of violence used by family members and their immediate environment adopt aggressive and hostile interpersonal patterns from the perpetrator, which are reflected in their family relations out of the family and in their further partner relationships (O'Leary et al. 2014; Ehrensaft et al., 2003).

The findings of this study were also considered from the developmental perspective, particularly taking into account such aspects as alcohol abuse, negative attitude to school and other manifestations of demoralization occurring in the adolescence period (Capaldi et al., 2012; O'Leary et al, 2014).

## Method

The research data was gathered in the police custody and in the correction unit, where from among female inmates the ones were selected who were convicted of crimes committed with the use of violence (classification of crimes as cited in Blachut et al., 2004) and in Family Diagnostic and Consulting Centres in the Silesian Province through examining divorce and child custody cases (classification based on evidentiary material collected in court cases). There were 44 women in total in the study group (N = 44).

The main research problem refers to determining educational, demographic and psychological factors affecting the intensification of aggression of the women who take action of a violent nature and defining risk factors for high aggression. The following specific questions were posed: RQ1: *What are the conditions of family socialisation and are they related to the intensification of aggression of the women using violence?* RQ2: *What were the educational conditions in which the subjects grew up? Is there any relation between selected educational aspects and the intensification of women's aggression?* RQ3: *Were there any manifestations of demoralization identified in the childhood and adolescence periods of the subjects and were they connected with the current intensification of aggression?* RQ4: *What are the demographic characteristics and are they connected with the aggression of the subjects?* RQ5: *What are the current life circumstances of the women using violence and are they in relation with the intensification of aggression?* RQ6: *Is there a relation between the styles of interpersonal functioning and intensification of women's aggression?* RQ7: *What factors condition the use of violence by women?*

Intensification of aggression has been defined as “the Aggression Factor” measured with the use of the Buss-Durkee Aggression Scale (SABD). This factor is composed of four subscales, namely: physical aggression, verbal aggression, indirect aggression and irritability (Stanik et al., 2006). The aggression factor was studied in terms of six groups of independent variables, namely: specific nature of educational situation, conditions of family socialisation, manifestations of demoralization in childhood and adolescence periods, current life circumstances, demographic characteristics and psychological variables (styles of interpersonal functioning measured by the Scale of Interpersonal Attitudes (SUI), a tool created by Stanik (Stanik 1994; Różańska-Kowal & Stanik, 2006)) and hostility, negativism and a sense of guilt measured by the SABD tool. The data in respect of other variables was gathered by means of the authors' own questionnaire made up of closed questions. There were yes/no questions and the respondents were asked to indicate the intensification of certain phenomena adequate for them on a five-degree scale.

The Pearson correlation coefficient was employed in order to determine the strength of the relation between the variables and the Spearman's rank correlation coefficient in the case of the variables expressed in a measurement scale. Distinctions between the examined groups were assessed by *t* test for two independent variables. The size effect between the groups was calculated using the Hedges *g* expression. Normality of the distributions in terms of the size of the group was examined by the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. To determine risk factors for high aggression of women using violence, a step-wise multiple regression analysis was conducted.

## Results

The average age of the study group was 34.6 years ( $\sigma=9.8$ ). The vast majority of the respondents remains in matrimony (45%) or partnerships (20%). 75% of the respondents were women who have experienced motherhood. 60% of the examined women were raised in full families, 23% stayed in care centres. The average age of the onset of alcohol use in the study group was 17.4 years. In childhood and adolescence periods, 42% of the respondents participated in fights, 46% frequently played truant, 47.5% ran away from home, 33% committed theft, 27% were detained. 55% of the respondents have never taken up any employment, 51% declared bad financial condition, 26% are addicted to psychoactive substances.

Violent crimes of which the examined women were convicted are: armed robbery (43%), murder (29%), grievous bodily harm (14%), beating (11%) and abuse (3%). 42% of the respondents already had a criminal record.

On the basis of the analysis, the significance of differences and the correlation coefficient, out of all the variables, 15 independent variables have been selected indicating a significant relation to the intensification of the aggression factor. The results are presented in Table 1.

In order to select risk factors for the high aggression of women, 12 explanatory variables related to the aggression factor were analysed (the following variables were excluded from the analysis: *aggressive-sadistic style, runaways from home and detention in childhood and adolescence periods* due to data redundancy). Finally, three main risk factors were obtained. The results are presented in Table 2.

**Table 1.** Characteristics of relations for the Aggression Factor variable in the study group (significance level  $\alpha < 0.05$ )

Variables	Relation with Aggression Factor	p – value for significance of differences test	t	Hedges' g	r
Specificity of educational circumstances	stay in care centre	.0624	–1.93	–.75	
	attitude to school				–.35*
Manifestations of demoralization in childhood and adolescence periods	onset of alcohol use				–.43
	participation in fights	.0074	2.86	.67	
	frequent truancy	.0033	–3.17	–.77	
	running away from home	.0489	–2.05	–.51	
	theft	.0013	–3.53	–1.02	
	detention	.0001	–4.52	–1.47	
Conditions of family socialisation	upbringing by biological parents	.2717	–1.12		
	upbringing in full family	.7948	–.26		
	having siblings and number of siblings	.8021	–.25		–.002
	criminal record of family members	.2831	–1.09		
	alcohol abuse by father	.3095	1.03		
	alcohol abuse by mother	.1867	1.35		
	being witness to domestic abuse	.4170	–.82		
	experiencing violence inflicted by mother	.2160	1.26		
	experiencing violence inflicted by father	.7604	.31		
	subjective assessment of relationship with mother				–.28**
	subjective assessment of relationship with father				–.02**
	experiencing sexual abuse	.9917	–.01		
Current life circumstances	employment	.0362	–2.19	–.51	
	financial condition/collecting social benefits	.6659	0.43		
	criminal record	.0114	2.68	.61	

Variables	Relation with Aggression Factor	p – value for significance of differences test	t	Hedges' g	r
Psychological variables	addiction to psychoactive substances	.2146	1.27		
	managerial-autocratic style				.37
	responsible-hypernormal style				-.24
	cooperative-overconventional style				-.14
	docile-dependent style				-.003
	self-effacing-masochistic style				-.04
	rebellious-distrustful style				.26
	aggressive-sadistic style				.66
	competitive-narcissistic style				.46
	self-acceptance				.13
	resourcefulness				-.12
	pessimism				.04
	negativism				.42
	resentment				.34
	suspiciousness				.16
	sense of guilt				-.17
Demographic characteristics	age				-.14
	education	.5069***			
	motherhood	.0797	-1.81		
	number of children				-.47
	marital status	.5769****			

\* attitude measured by means of Likert scale, where 1 – I did not like school very much; 5 – I liked school very much

\*\* relations measured by means of Likert scale, where 1 – very bad relations; 5 – very good relations

\*\*\* use of Kruskal-Wallis AVOVA test,  $\chi^2 = 3.3129$ ; df = 4

\*\*\*\* use of Kruskal-Wallis AVOVA test,  $\chi^2 = 4.7454$ ; df = 6

**Table 2.** Coefficients and statistics of the model obtained in the step-wise multiple regression analysis for the explanatory model of the level of *the Aggression Factor*.

Variables	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	<i>p</i>	Statistics of model <i>df</i> = 3,19	
	$\beta$	B	$\beta$		R2	<i>p</i>
Negativism	.641	.626	.534	.0007		
Attitude to school		-.44	-.32	.0288	.647	.00004
Theft in childhood and adolescence periods			.336	.0290		

## Discussion

The selected risk factors for the high aggression of women taking action of a violent nature constitute educational circumstances, manifestations of demoralization in childhood and adolescence periods and psychological variables.

Responding to RQ1, it is possible to conclude that the variables from the category of family socialisation conditions are not significantly related to the intensification degree of the aggression factor in the study group.

Regarding RQ2, the determined specificity of educational circumstances constitutes the risk factor for high aggression in the study group. The dominating role here is played by a negative attitude to school education in childhood and adolescence periods, which constitutes a factor actively modifying educational circumstances of the child. It should be noted that denying school duty in adolescence period positively correlates with manifestations of social maladjustment and demoralization, therefore, the obtained results are to be discussed together with the aspects included in RQ3. Domagała-Kręcioch (2008) indicates that lasting failure, generating a negative attitude to school duty by socially maladjusted girls, originates from hostility to demonstrate social interactions. The experience deriving from forensic assessment of punishable offences of minors and demoralization, as well as the analysis of the documentation collected for the purposes of court proceedings, indicates that a negative attitude to education manifesting itself in frequent truancy and school absence, disrespectful approach to teachers and pupils' duties is most often the first alarming symptom of social maladjustment, which escalates within a short time period into a progressive process demoralization (including, inter alia, committing theft). According to Urban's (2000) evolutionary model of a criminal career, individuals who start a life of crime and



get arrested at an early stage of life are considerably susceptible to a relapse into crime and the chronic commission of aggressive crimes in adulthood. The above author indicates that the presented phenomenon is primarily affected by a hostile attitude and committing theft as early as in childhood. In his research studies on violence risk factors for underage girls, Gierowski (2009) similarly emphasises the significance of school problems and criminal conduct. The findings obtained by these authors are compliant with risk factors for the aggressive expression of women.

The results regarding demographic characteristics (RQ4) and current life circumstances (RQ5) indicate a significant, positive correlation between lack of employment and having a criminal record and the intensification of aggression of the examined women. The results comply with the above-cited literature of the subject (Urban, 2000; O'Leary, 2008; Yang et al., 2013). The research referred to, by Harwas-Napierała and Trempała (2002), indicates that women feel the need to have a career and fulfilment in this aspect and when deprived of such an opportunity in favour of complete dedication to household chores, they experience numerous tensions and frustration, which are reflected in conflicts occurring in their close relationships. It appears that the following thesis may be proposed that, in accordance with the frustration-aggression hypothesis by Dollard and Miller, subjectively perceived deprivation of needs by the examined women, relating to creation of their own financial and economic circumstances and through lack of professional activity, leads to giving vent in the form of aggressive conduct mostly directed at their immediate environment. This interpretation of the data seems to be confirmed by studies on women's aggressive behaviour, which points out that in most cases the people who are victimised by female perpetrators are the closest to them, mainly partners, friends and other family members and children (Yang et al., 2013; Rossegger et al., 2009; Logan & Weizmann-Henelius, 2012).

As regards RQ6, the gathered results indicate a significant relationship between the aggression factor and the aggressive-sadistic and competitive-narcissistic styles of social functioning, as well as the expression of behaviours bearing the hallmarks of negativism and suspiciousness. It should be noted that negativism manifesting itself in attitudes and actions contradictory to the expectations of the environment, constitutes the major component of behaviour, i.e., hostility (Gierowski, 2009). The aggressive-sadistic style is linked to a tendency to attack the environment through physical aggression, and a verbal one too, manifesting itself by calling names, ridiculing and criticising others. At the root of this behaviour lies hostility towards oneself and the environment, and also perception of one's own person as a dominating one over the others in interpersonal contacts, which is also the

basis of the expression of competitive-narcissistic attitudes in interpersonal relationships (Stanik, 1994). In the face of lack of data in respect of studies on adult women-perpetrators, the available research conducted on groups of underage girls is to be cited in this discussion. Gierowski (2009) claims that underage girls in comparison with boys are more likely to demonstrate a sense of hostility; they attribute bad intentions to the environment and treat it in a distrustful and suspicious way. They are characterised by considerably higher willingness to react with aggression and violence to any situations perceived as threatening to or hampering the satisfaction of their needs and achievement of life goals. In other, comparative studies, Różańska - Kowal (2009) indicates that minor girls in juxtaposition with the control group achieve lower results in a docile-dependent style and higher results in self-effacing-masochistic, rebellious-distrustful and aggressive-sadistic styles, while the competitive-narcissistic style of social functioning is characteristic of the group of minor boys. It appears that in the study group of adult women, by way of specific socialisation, co-forming of male aggressive patterns of behaviour may occur. It may be also affected by factors resulting from current functioning of the respondents in correction units, being part of the vast majority of the group.

To recapitulate the presented discussion, also with reference to the posed RQ7, it can be concluded that while searching for risk factors of the expression of women's aggressive behaviour, the most significant ones which have been defined are: negativism, disrespectful attitude to school and starting a life of crime by committing theft as early as in childhood and adolescence periods. Recognition of risk factors distribution for the occurrence of irregularities involves applicable benefits in the form of efficient prophylactic actions implemented.

## **Applicable aspects of the research**

The obtained research results indicate that there is a need to take prophylactic measures against aggressive behaviours. Since there are significant dependencies between aggression in an adult's life and manifestations of demoralization identified in childhood and adolescence periods, it is advisable to undertake preventive action commencing at the early education stage. What should be emphasized is the relevance of preventive educational actions in the form of emotion control training (in particular coping with anger) and skills workshops for maintaining relationships with others, particularly including: forming communication abilities, increasing positive exchange of reciprocal reinforcement and conflict resolution. It would be also beneficial to conduct workshops for children and youth devoted to prophylactic

programmes focusing on early recognition of violence symptoms in their current relationships, as well as in future procreative families, including basic information on the phenomenon of violence, its mechanisms, forms, kinds, effects, and also psychological characteristics of persons victimised by their perpetrators.

The studies conclude that there is the need to undertake steps aimed at building up a positive attitude towards school duty prior to problems arising from performing this duty, negativism in attitude and in progressive social maladjustment, which may lead to the occurrence of the phenomenon of demoralization.

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